

SNOW JOB

by Spirit

"Be nice, clear your ice." Ben Wicks timely cartoon reminds citizens, at this time of year, of their neighborly obligations to keep sidewalk areas cleared of ice and snow within 12 hours of a snowstorm. This reminder is directed not only at those living in residential areas, but also to commercial and public sector owners and tenants. It is a light-hearted and low key approach but the message it conveys is intended to be taken seriously.

Overnight on January 12/13, 1993 there was a steady fall of snow mixed with freezing rain throughout the Metro Toronto area. By early afternoon the accumulation in most places was several centimetres deep. This was the case in the area around the Ontario College of Art at 100 McCaul Street.

I have an afternoon class on Wednesdays. When I drove my van to my parking space shortly before 1pm on Wednesday January 13th, I noticed that there was a team of four maintenance men with snow shovels engaged in clearing snow from the front steps of 100 McCaul St. and an area of the adjoining walkway. I observed that they all looked in my direction as I pulled in to park and lowered my wheelchair lift. The snow was so heavily packed that it was impossible for me to manoeuvre my wheelchair off the lift and through the uncleared sidewalk in

from the parking booth is blocked the parking attendant is unable to see me, nor is it possible for me to make him aware of my need for assistance. The maintenance staff continued to shovel the steps and made no

effort to be of any assistance. I called to two male passers-by and they kindly pulled and pushed me through the heavily packed snow so that I could get into the building.

On arrival inside I went to the special needs office, hoping to make Cynthia aware of the need to have a pathway cleared. She was unavailable at the time so I returned during my break. I told

her of my problem and drew a detailed diagram indicating what was needed and making several suggestions, re: monitoring the conditions of the area involved during bad weather.

At 4pm when I was ready to leave I assumed that the sidewalk in question would have been cleared - WRONG! As a result, I again had to depend on the goodwill of passers-

by to assist me. Since I had notified Cynthia of the difficulty I feel that this could and should have been addressed by O.C.A. staff. Snow clearing is not my responsibility. It was obvious that some staff had been assigned to snow removal duties, but apparently my reported need for access was not considered a priority. O.C.A. has designated a special needs office and according to the very attractive pamphlet put out by the office "O.C.A. is committed to developing a partnership with students to ensure that their INDIVIDUAL (emphasis mine) needs are met with dignity." In what way were my needs met with dignity when I was put in the position of having to appeal to strangers to come to my assistance because of the neglect of the College to make a clear path for me, even after I had brought the need to the attention of the Project co-ordinator?

The afore mentioned pamphlet policy statement goes on to say "The Special Needs Office recognizes the right of all indi-

vidual to have equal access to the full barrier-free learning environment through the use of expertise, innovative administration and progressive curriculum."

What full barrier-free learning environment? Might I respectfully suggest that anyone at O.C.A. student or staff, who believes that this building at 100 McCaul St. represents a barrier-free environment restrict themselves to using a wheelchair for even one day. Where would that person eat or go for a coffee break? Go to Gallery 76? Go to



order to reach the wheelchair access ramp at the front of the building. Because the view

the Pub, surely social contact is an essential component of learning? What would they do if the elevator was out of service? If wash-rooms (the only 2 accessible located on the 3rd floor) were inaccessible or unavailable? How would they carry paintings or sculptures? If the sidewalks were snow-packed how would that person even get into the building? How would that person be treated as a fellow student or staff with the right to dignity or as a nuisance, a pariah?

Thankfully, not everyone is unfeeling or thoughtless. I must express my sincere and heartfelt appreciation to all those who have gone out of their way, taken the time and made the effort to be friendly and helpful. Many thanks to those who have come to my assistance especially in snowy weather, to those who have offered to pick up coffee or refreshments for me and invited me to join them in "hanging-out". This is a world renowned school. The instructors are superb. I want so much to feel that I truly have a part to play here. Those who have extended a hand of friendship to me - give me an inkling of hope that maybe - just maybe I do.